

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently amended) A method of stabilising an underground formation surrounding a borehole comprising placing a treatment fluid in the formation, the treatment fluid comprising cross-linkable polymer and a cross-linking agent, ~~and~~ allowing the treatment fluid to gel in-situ, ~~characterised in that and pumping,~~ after placement of the treatment fluid in the formation, an activator fluid ~~is pumped~~ into the well to accelerate the crosslinking of the polymer and the development of the gel strength.

Claim 2 (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the reaction between the activator and the treatment fluid is not exothermic.

Claim 3 (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 ~~or 2~~, wherein the cross-linkable polymer is a polymer containing acrylamide functional groups.

Claim 4 (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein the polymer comprises polyacrylamide, partially hydrolysed polyacrylamide or copolymers of acrylamides and acrylates.

Claim 5 (Currently amended) The method of claim 3 ~~or claim 4~~, wherein the polymer is a partially hydrolysed polymer with a molecular weight of ~~around~~ about 500,000.

Claim 6 (Currently amended) The method ~~according to any preceding claim of claim 1,~~ wherein the cross-linking agent is a molecule or complex containing a reactive transition metal cation.

Claim 7 (Original) The method of claim 6, wherein the cross-linking agent is a zirconium lactate solution.

Claim 8 (Currently amended) The method ~~according to any preceding claim of claim 1,~~
wherein the activator comprises a solution of zirconium chloride or zirconium acetate.

Claim 9 (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the activator comprises a
5-20% solution of zirconium chloride in seawater.

Claim 10 (Currently amended) The method ~~according to any preceding claim of claim 1,~~
wherein either the activator ~~and/or~~ the treatment fluid or both comprises ~~includes~~ colloidal silica.

Claim 11 (Currently amended) The method ~~according to any preceding claim of claim 1,~~
wherein the treatment fluid has a viscosity of up to 300 cp.

Claim 12 (Currently amended) A method of drilling a well, wherein the stabilization
treatment ~~according to any of claims 1 to 11 of claim 1~~ of claim 1 is carried out during the drilling of the
well.

Claim 13 (Currently amended) The method ~~according to any preceding claim of claim 1,~~
whereby the treatment fluid and the activator are sequentially placed into the well through a drill
string.

Claim 14 (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the sequence is repeated.

Claim 15 (Currently amended) The method of claim 13 ~~or claim 14,~~ wherein the treatment
fluid and the activator are separated from each other by spacer fluids.

Claim 16 (Currently amended) The method ~~as claimed in any of claims 12 to 15 of claim~~
12, wherein the fluids are applied to the zone of interest by means of a placement tool placed in
the drill string which injects the fluids into the zone of interest via ports, while mechanically
compressing the wall of the well by means of structures formed on the outside of the placement
tool which act on the borehole wall as the drill string rotates.

Claim 17(Currently amended) The method ~~as claimed in any of claims 12 to 16~~ of claim 12, wherein the activator is stored in a downhole reservoir located near the bottom of the drill string and arranged to inject slugs of activator into a drilling fluid.

Claim 18(Currently amended) The method ~~as claimed in any preceding claims~~ of claim 1, wherein the bottomhole well temperature ranges from about 4°C to about 25°C.

Claim 19 (New) The method of claim 12, whereby the treatment fluid and the activator are sequentially placed into the well through a drill string.

Claim 20 (New) The method of claim 19, wherein the fluids are applied to the zone of interest by means of a placement tool placed in the drill string which injects the fluids into the zone of interest via ports, while mechanically compressing the wall of the well by means of structures formed on the outside of the placement tool which act on the borehole wall as the drill string rotates.

Claim 21 (New) The method of claim 19, wherein the activator is stored in a downhole reservoir located near the bottom of the drill string and arranged to inject slugs of activator into a drilling fluid.

Claim 22 (New) The method of claim 12, wherein the bottomhole well temperature ranges from about 4°C to about 25°C.